

FACT SHEET

Green Cleaning Guidelines and Definitions

When selecting cleaning products, schools should look to purchase Green Seal approved products, a list of which has been attached. Green Seal's product testing process is the first step in making institutional purchasing of cleaning products easy. Currently, Green Seal is the only green cleaning certification company in the US and their standards may be strengthened in the future, as the industry grows. Schools can look to the following general guidelines when buying and using cleaning products:

- **Obtain and read material safety data sheets for products.** These will help identify the types of chemicals in the products and whether the cleaners are environmentally sound and safe for use. If you need more information, contact the vendor and ask. Upon request, many manufacturers now provide information such as biodegradability, skin and eye irritation data (and other acute, but not chronic, effects) and full ingredient lists.
 - Avoid products with fragrances or non-food grade dyes. Most fragrances and some dyes are petroleum based and can irritate asthma, amongst other health effects. Green Seal does allow these types of fragrances and dyes in its certified products. To avoid them, seek Green Seal certified products that do not contain fragrances.
 - Look for "bio-based" products.
 - Avoid products in aerosol cans.
 - Avoid products with 2-butoxyethanol or other glycol ethers. These chemicals are currently in some Green Seal cleaners.
- **Educate janitorial workers in proper cleaning practices.** This includes education on effective cleaning methods, the hazards of cleaning chemicals, and the utilization of green cleaning products. A study found that improved cleaning techniques, such as use of large entryway mats and damp-mopping instead of sweeping, reduced airborne bacteria by 37 percent, fungi by 62% and dust by 52%. In addition, janitors often handle highly toxic chemicals without knowledge of their toxicity or how to use them without injuring themselves and others. As various environmentally preferable products still pose some health and environmental risks, training janitors properly can reduce the amount of product used as well as the risk of chemical injury. When purchasing products, ask if the company provides staff training on proper product use.
- **To reduce environmental and health impacts, use disinfectants carefully and sparingly.** Disinfectant should be used only when necessary, such as for body fluid spills and as required by the Department of Health or Center for Disease Control. When they are required, use a disinfectant that kills only the target organism; labels should specify which organisms the product is effective against. Clean surfaces before disinfecting; most disinfectants are only effective when used on clean surfaces. All instructions on the label should be followed in order for disinfectants to work effectively. Disinfectants are registered pesticides and thus should never be used for general cleaning and in the presence of children. Alternative products that are effective sanitizers do exist, including hydrogen peroxide.
- **Educate teachers and school staff about the safety and effectiveness of green cleaning and the dangers of traditional cleaning products.** Teachers or parents may express concerns about the effectiveness of green cleaners and may complain about the lack of "clean" smells without the fragrances or strong odors of traditional chemical cleaners. Education is key to resolve these concerns. In addition, all teachers should be instructed that they are not to bring in their own unapproved cleaning or deodorizing products, including air fresheners.

*Sources: INFORM, Inc. www.informinc.org and Grassroots Environmental Education. Inc, www.grassrootsinfo.org



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Green Cleaning Definitions

Bio-based: a commercial or industrial product in which more than 50% of the ingredients (other than water) are biological or renewable domestic agricultural (plant, animal or marine) or forestry materials

Biodegradable: a product in which 60-70% of its ingredients break down and return to the environment within 28 days, for each organic component above 1% in the ready-to-use product

Disinfectant: any product designed to kill microbes

Sanitizer: any product designed to reduce the number of microbes

Carcinogen: a cancer-causing agent

Mutagen: any agent, such as ultraviolet light, radioactive elements or chemicals ingredients which can induce or increase the frequency of mutation in a living organism

Teratogen: any agent such as a virus, drug, or radiation that adversely affects and causes malformations of a developing fetus or embryo

Petrochemical: any product derived from crude oil or a petroleum distillate.

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs): organic chemicals that have a high vapor pressure and easily form vapors at normal temperature and pressure. Examples include aerosol spray can propellants, petroleum distillates and solvents. VOCs are a significant source of indoor air pollution.

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